CHATURANG KATHA

Vetala Stories

VIRVAR

No. 504 PICTORIAL CLASSICS FOR YOUNG AND OLD Re. 1

The *Vetala Panchavimshati* is a collection of stories involving a *vetala* (a spirit that haunts corpses) and a legendary king, King Vikramaditya of Ujjaini. The king, for certain reasons, had to fetch the *vetala*, and to fetch him in total silence. The *vetala* insisted on telling stories and demanding answers to the problems these stories posed. Being wise, Vikramaditya knew all the answers. Knowing them, he had to answer. Answering, he broke the silence imposed upon him, thus letting the *vetala* escape again and again to his perch on a near-by tree.

The result is a collection of stories that raise questions of justice, fair play, character, good and bad, etc. that trouble most people in their journey through life.

CHATURANG KATHA has already brought you the first *vetala* story—PADMAVATI. In this issue we bring you two more—VIRVAR and MADHUMAVATI.

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VIRVAR

KING VIKRAMADITYA OF UJJAINI WAS ON A FEARSOME AND DIFFICULT ERRAND. TO PLEASE AN EXACTING ASCETIC, HE HAD AGREED TO FETCH A VETALA FROM A NEARBY CEMETERY. WHILE DOING SO, HE HAD TO OBSERVE STRICT SILENCE.

TO KEEP SILENT WAS NOT EASY. THE VETALA WOULD TELL STORIES THAT POSED A RIDDLE. THE KING, IF HE KNEW THE ANSWER, WAS BOUND TO SPEAK. IF HE DID NOT ANSWER, THE CONSEQUENCES WOULD BE DIRE.

I WILL BREAK YOUR HEAD INTO A 1000 PIECES!

I WONDER HOW MANY MORE TIMES I WILL HAVE TO COME BACK FOR THIS VETALA. I KNEW THE ANSWER TO HIS LAST RIDDLE!

THE VETALA CLEARED HIS THROAT AND BEGAN—

LISTEN, O KING, TO THE STORY OF RUPSEN.

AT LEAST HIS STORIES ARE INTERESTING.

RUPSEN WAS A KING WHO RULED FROM THE CITY OF VARDHAMANA. ONE DAY, AS HE RESTED IN AN APARTMENT ADJOINING THE PALACE GATES—

WHAT IS GOING ON AT THE GATES?

I WILL FIND OUT, YOUR MAJESTY.

THE GATEKEEPER WAS ASKED FOR AN EXPLANATION.

MY LORD, YOUR PALACE GATES ATTRACT MANY PASSERS-BY. THEY COME FOR ALMS, OR JUST TO WHILE AWAY AN IDLE HOUR.

IS THERE ANYONE SEEKING SPECIAL AUDIENCE WITH ME?

AS A MATTER OF FACT, THERE IS. AN ARMED SOLDIER OF FORTUNE WHO WISHES TO ENTER YOUR SERVICE.

SEND HIM IN.

A GUARD RETURNED WITH THE MAN.

I HEAR THAT YOU DESIRE TO SERVE ME. WHAT IS YOUR NAME? WHAT FEE DO YOU EXPECT?

MY NAME IS VIRVAR. I WOULD LIKE A 1000 TOLAS OF GOLD TO BE GIVEN TO ME EVERY DAY.

THE KING WAS AMAZED.

HOW MANY DEPENDANTS DO YOU HAVE?

MY WIFE, MY SON AND MY DAUGHTER.

THERE WAS A BURST OF LAUGHTER.
HE DEMANDS A LARGE SUM AND THEN DECLARES HE HAS HARDLY ANYONE TO SUPPORT!
HE MUST BE MAD.
BUT SOMETHING IN VIRVAR'S FACE AND BEARING INSPIRED THE KING'S CONFIDENCE.
I AM SURE HE WILL NOT MISUSE THE FUNDS.
HE HAS NOT THROWN ME OUT. THERE IS HOPE.
THE KING CALLED FOR THE TREASURER.
I HAVE DECIDED TO EMPLOY VIRVAR.
I AM GRATEFUL, MY LORD.
VIRVAR RECEIVED HIS FIRST 1000 TOLAS AND WENT HOME, FULL OF PLANS.

ON REACHING HOME, HE GAVE HIS WIFE THE GLAD NEWS.
500 TOLAS SHOULD BE DISTRIBUTED AMONGST DESERVING BRAHMANS.
250 TOLAS SHOULD LOOK AFTER THE NEEDS OF PILGRIMS, DEVOTEES AND RELIGIOUS MENDICANTS...
...AND 250 TOLAS SHOULD DO TO FEED THE POOR OF THE CITY AND ALSO MEET OUR HUMBLE NEEDS.
THE KING HAD JUDGED HIM CORRECTLY. VIRVAR WAS NOT LOOKING FOR PERSONAL GAIN.

VIRVAR WAS EVER MINDFUL OF HIS MASTER'S NEEDS.

VIRVAR, I AM RESTLESS.

YOUR MAJESTY, I WILL GET THE COURT MUSICIANS TO PLAY YOU SOOTHING MUSIC.

BY NIGHT, HE WOULD MOUNT GUARD OVER THE KING'S COUCH. THE KING HAD ONLY TO STIR—

IS ANYBODY THERE?

YOUR MAJESTY, VIRVAR WAITS ON YOU.

SOON, VIRVAR WAS AN INVALUABLE PART OF THE ROYAL HOUSEHOLD.

HE IS ALWAYS THERE WHEN NEEDED. BUT HIS TOTAL LOYALTY HAS STILL TO BE TESTED.

THE OPPORTUNITY SOON AROSE. ONE DARK NIGHT, THE KING CALLED OUT —
VIRVAR, VIRVAR...
YOUR MAJESTY, WHAT IS IT? WHAT CAN I DO?
THAT AWFUL WAILING — I CANNOT GET TO SLEEP. CAN'T YOU HEAR IT?
YES, INDEED, YOUR MAJESTY. IT IS THE VOICE OF A WOMAN IN DISTRESS. IT SEEMS TO COME FROM THE BURNING GROUNDS.

THE KING MOVED OUT ON TO THE BALCONY OF HIS BEDCHAMBER.
THIS WILL TEST HIS LOYALTY. MOST MEN WOULD HESITATE TO GO TO THE CEMETERY AT NIGHT.
I MUST KNOW WHAT SHE IS WAILING ABOUT.
VIRVAR DID NOT HESITATE.
YOUR MAJESTY, I SHALL GO IMMEDIATELY.
AND HE SET OFF, CLOSELY FOLLOWED BY THE KING IN DISGUISE.
THE HOWL OF JACKALS AND THE WEIRD, FLICKERING LIGHT FROM THE BURNING PYRES MADE VIRVAR SHUDDER. AS HE PROCEEDED —
I CAN NO LONGER HEAR THE JACKALS — SO LOUD ARE HER CRIES.

SUDDENLY, IN THE FLARE OF A NEARBY PYRE HE SAW —
WHAT A BEAUTIFUL WOMAN! AND SO RICHLY DRESSED! WHAT ON EARTH COULD SHE BE DOING HERE?
AS HE STOOD GAPING, SHE FLUNG HER ARMS AND LEGS ABOUT AND BEAT HER HEAD REPEATEDLY.
ALAS! ALAS!
VIRVAR TOOK HIS COURAGE IN BOTH HANDS.
WHO ARE YOU? WHAT GREAT CALAMITY HAS OVER-TAKEN YOU?
I AM THE ROYAL GLORY AND I AM THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION.

VIRVAR WAS PUZZLED.
DO I UNDERSTAND YOU TO SAY THAT KING RUPSEN'S GLORIOUS REIGN WILL SOON COME TO AN END?
YES. I CANNOT BEAR IT. I HAVE HAD SUCH GOOD TIMES IN THE KINGDOM OF VARDHAMANA!
VIRVAR SILENCED HER WITH A GESTURE.
CALM YOURSELF, WOMAN. WHAT EXACTLY DO YOU PREDICT?
CORRUPTION AND VICE ARE RAMPANT. MISFORTUNE WILL FOLLOW. KING RUPSEN WILL DIE A MONTH FROM NOW. MARK MY WORDS!

VIRVAR WAS BY NOW WIDE AWAKE AND FULLY ALERT.
IS THERE NO WAY OF AVERTING THIS DISASTER? I WANT KING RUPSEN TO LIVE A HUNDRED YEARS.
THE APPARITION STOPPED HER WILD PRANCING AND LED HIM TO A NEARBY TREE.
IT IS ALL IN YOUR HANDS.
HOW CAN I CHANGE THE WAYS OF DESTINY? HOWEVER...
THERE IS A TEMPLE TO DEVI EIGHT MILES FROM HERE, AS YOU GO EAST. YOU MUST PLACATE THE GODDESS OF THAT TEMPLE.
HOW?

THE APPARITION PAUSED DRAMATICALLY. VIRVAR FELT A SLIGHT TWINGE OF FEAR FOR THE FIRST TIME.

YOU MUST, WITH YOUR OWN HANDS, CHOP OFF YOUR SON'S HEAD. THAT IS THE PRICE THAT DESTINY DEMANDS FOR THE KING'S LONG LIFE.

B...B... BUT...

SHE HAS VANISHED, AND I AM LEFT WITH THIS HEAVY BURDEN OF RESPONSIBILITY! I MUST GO HOME AT ONCE.

I WONDER WHAT HE WILL DO. WILL A FATHER'S LOVE WIN OVER THE CALL OF DUTY?

THE KING FOLLOWED VIRVAR HOME. HE COULD HEAR HIM TALKING TO HIS WIFE.
WAKE UP! LISTEN...
AND VIRVAR TOLD HER ALL THAT HAD HAPPENED.
THE WIFE WOKE UP THEIR SON AND TOLD HIM.
SON, YOUR FATHER HAS TO SACRIFICE YOU. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE KING LIVES.
MOTHER, FIRSTLY, I CANNOT DISOBEY YOU; SECONDLY, IT IS IN THE KING'S SERVICE; THIRDLY, I AM HONOURED TO BE A SACRIFICE TO DEVI.

VIRVAR TURNED TO HIS WIFE.

IF YOU AGREE, AND ONLY IF YOU DO, WILL I PERFORM THIS AWFUL DUTY.

MY DEAR HUSBAND, YOUR WELFARE DEPENDS ON THE KING'S WELFARE AND YOUR WELFARE SHOULD BE MY ONLY CONCERN.

THE DAUGHTER DID NOT ACCEPT THE DECISION SO EASILY.

IF MOTHER, FATHER AND KING CANNOT PROTECT US, WHO WILL?

AND TALKING OF RIGHTS AND DUTIES, THEY MADE THEIR WAY TO THE TEMPLE OF DEVI. THE KING FOLLOWED AT A DISTANCE, THOUGH WITHIN EARSHOT.

VIRVAR ENTERED THE TEMPLE, PRAYED FOR THE KING'S LONG LIFE AND HAPPY REIGN AND SWIFTLY CUT OFF HIS SON'S HEAD.
AH!

THE DAUGHTER PICKED UP THE SWORD.
I DO NOT WISH TO LIVE.
AND SHE KILLED HERSELF ON THE SPOT.

THEN—
I CANNOT LIVE WITHOUT MY CHILDREN.

VIRVAR LOOKED AT THE LIFELESS BODIES OF HIS NEAR AND DEAR ONES.
WHY SHOULD I LIVE? MY DUTY IS DONE; BESIDES, I HAVE NO ONE AND NOTHING TO LIVE FOR.
AND HE TOO CHOPPED OFF HIS HEAD.

THE KING ENTERED THE TEMPLE AND STOOD AGHAST.

ALL THIS FOR ME? I AM NOT FIT TO LIVE!

AND HE PICKED UP THE SWORD IN ORDER TO END HIS LIFE.

BUT JUST AS HE RAISED IT, THE GODDESS APPEARED, HER HAND RAISED IN BLESSING.

I AM PLEASED WITH YOUR HUMILITY. ASK ME FOR A BOON.

MOTHER, IF YOU WISH TO REWARD ME, BRING THESE GOOD SOULS BACK TO LIFE.

THE GODDESS VANISHED FROM SIGHT...

...AND SOON RETURNED WITH HOLY WATER.
THIS WILL REVIVE THEM.
ONE BY ONE, THEY SPRANG TO LIFE, WHOLE AND UNHARMED. THE KING TURNED TO VIRVAR—
HALF MY KINGDOM IS YOURS. YOU DESERVE NO LESS, MY LOYAL SERVANT.
LONG LIVE MY KING!
THE STORY HAVING ENDED, THE VETALA POSED HIS PROBLEM.
WHO, WISE KING, WAS GREATER IN VIRTUE— THE KING OR VIRVAR?
THE KING, OF COURSE. VIRVAR WAS MERELY DOING HIS DUTY, THE KING WAS DOING MORE THAN HIS DUTY.
VIKRAMADITYA STARTED WALKING BACK TO THE VETALA'S TREE; FOR ONCE AGAIN THE SPIRIT HAD ESCAPED.

MADHUMAVATI

KING VIKRAMADITYA TOOK THE VETALA FROM THE TREE AND STARTED HIS WEARY JOURNEY BACK TO THE ASCETIC.

GIVE EAR, O KING...

HIS RIDDLES ARE GETTING MORE COMPLICATED, BUT MY BRAIN SEEMS TO BE GETTING CLEARER. HOW MANY MORE TRIPS, I WONDER.

IN DHARMASTHAL, ON THE BANKS OF THE YAMUNA, LIVED A BRAHMAN NAMED KESHAVA. HE HAD A BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER, MADHUMAVATI.

HER PARENTS THOUGHT IT WAS TIME TO FIND HER A GOOD HUSBAND.

YOU ARE OFF TOMORROW TO ATTEND A WEDDING CEREMONY...

I KNOW WHAT IS ON YOUR MIND. I WILL KEEP MY EYES OPEN. I AM BOUND TO COME ACROSS A SUITABLE YOUNG MAN.

HER BROTHER TOO WAS WORRIED ABOUT MADHUMAVATI. AS HE SET OFF FOR THE DAY—

I HOPE I MEET SOMEONE TODAY.

I WILL BE MARRIED WHEN THE FATES WILL IT, NOT A DAY BEFORE.

THE FATHER LEFT TO ATTEND THE MARRIAGE, AND THE SON FOR HIS TEACHER'S HOUSE. AND THEN —

I WONDER WHO IS AT THE DOOR.

KNOCK

MADHUMAVATI'S MOTHER OPENED THE DOOR TO FIND A HANDSOME YOUNG MAN.
I HAVE WALKED A LONG WAY. MAY I REST AWHILE?
YOU ARE WELCOME. YOU MUST EAT WITH US.
AS HE ATE, SHE TALKED TO HIM AND SOON LEARNT ALL ABOUT HIS FAMILY, HIS PLACE OF BIRTH, HIS FORTUNES.
I THINK HE IS JUST THE RIGHT MAN FOR MADHUMAVATI.
I HAVE A DAUGHTER. YOU WOULD MAKE HER A GOOD HUSBAND.
I CAUGHT A GLIMPSE OF HER JUST NOW. I AM HONOURED. SHE IS VERY BEAUTIFUL.

AT DUSK, HER HUSBAND RETURNED, BRINGING WITH HIM A YOUNG MAN...
THAT MUST BE A BRIDEGROOM FOR MADHUMAVATI. WHAT DO I DO NOW?
THERE IS A YOUNG MAN IN OUR FRONT YARD. I WONDER...
INDOORS —
I HAVE PROMISED TO GIVE MADHUMAVATI TO A YOUNG MAN. YOU MUST HAVE SEEN HIM...
HOW AWKWARD! I HAVE OFFERED HER IN MARRIAGE TO ANOTHER YOUNG MAN.
AS THEY STOOD PERPLEXED, THE SON ENTERED.
FATHER, I HAVE ALSO BROUGHT A YOUNG MAN. HE IS WAITING OUTSIDE— WITH THE OTHER TWO!
ONE GIRL AND THREE SUITORS! I WISH WE HADN'T BEEN QUITE SO PROMPT.

WHILE THE THREE OF THEM STOOD DISCUSSING THE SITUATION—
AAAH! A SNAKE...
THAT IS MADHUMAVATI!
THEY RAN OUT TO FIND HER LYING UNCONSCIOUS.
THERE WAS PANIC. THE MEN RAN OFF IN SEARCH OF SNAKE CHARMERS, CONJURORS AND MAGICIANS. SOON, THEY WERE ALL STANDING OVER THE UNCONSCIOUS GIRL.

THE EXPERTS STARTED GIVING THEIR OPINIONS.

A MAN BITTEN BY A SNAKE ON THE 5TH, 6TH, 8TH, 9TH AND 14TH DAY OF THE MONTH CANNOT SURVIVE.

ONE WHO HAS BEEN BITTEN ON THE 5TH, 6TH, 8TH, 9TH AND 14TH DAY CAN REVIVE.

THE THIRD AND FOURTH GAVE EVEN MORE BAFFLING OPINIONS. THE FIFTH PUT AN END TO ALL SPECULATION.

BRAHMA HIMSELF CANNOT BREATHE LIFE INTO THIS DEAD BODY.

MADHUMAVATI'S BODY WAS BURNT.

SHE WOULD HAVE BEEN AN IDEAL WIFE.

PERHAPS IT IS FOR THE BEST. THESE MEN WOULD HAVE FOUGHT OVER HER.

AFTER THE FUNERAL, ONE SUITOR COLLECTED HER BONES, DONNED THE GARB OF A MENDICANT AND ROAMED FROM FOREST TO FOREST.
THE SECOND KEPT HER ASHES, BUILT A HUT ON THAT VERY SPOT AND BEGAN TO LIVE IN IT.
THE THIRD, WITH POUCH AND BEGGING BOWL, WANDERED FROM VILLAGE TO VILLAGE.

ONE DAY, TOWARDS NIGHTFALL, THE THIRD SUITOR CAME TO A VILLAGE.
WILL YOU GIVE ME SHELTER FOR THE NIGHT?
OF COURSE, I AM JUST ABOUT TO SIT DOWN TO MY MEAL. WILL YOU JOIN ME?
AS THEY ATE —
THAT CHILD IS A CURSE! HE HAS BEEN CRYING ALL DAY.
FIND OUT WHAT IS WRONG. HE SOUNDS UNHAPPY.

JUST THEN THE CHILD CAME RUNNING INTO THE ROOM.
MOTHER, TELL ME A STORY. I CAN'T SLEEP.
LET ME FINISH WITH OUR GUEST. I WILL BE WITH YOU IN A MINUTE.
NO, I WANT YOU TO COME NOW!
STOP IT, OR YOU WILL SPILL THE FOOD.
BUT THE CHILD WOULD NOT STOP.
LEAVE ME BE OR I WILL KILL YOU!

THE CHILD ONLY CRIED ALL THE MORE. THE MOTHER PICKED UP THE CHILD AND —

YOU DESERVE TO BURN. I HAVE HAD ENOUGH.

THE GUEST WAS HORRIFIED. HE GOT UP.

WHY DON'T YOU FINISH THE FOOD?

HOW CAN I EAT? I HAVE JUST SEEN A CHILD THROWN INTO THE FIRE.

THE BRAHMAN WAS UNPERTURBED. HE FETCHED A BOOK, OPENED IT AND MUTTERED A SPELL.

THE CHILD EMERGED FROM THE FIRE, WHOLE AND WELL.

COME HERE, SON. GO TO YOUR MOTHER AND SAY YOU ARE SORRY.

THE SECRET OF BRINGING THE DEAD TO LIFE! IT IS THERE, IN THAT BOOK!

THE HOUSEHOLD WAS SOON FAST ASLEEP.

I MUST HAVE THAT BOOK. WITH IT, I CAN BRING MADHUMAVATI BACK TO LIFE!

HE STOLE INTO THE BRAHMAN'S ROOM, GOT HOLD OF THE BOOK AND—

I MUST BE OUT OF THIS VILLAGE LONG BEFORE DAWN.

HE HEADED FOR DHARMASTHAL, AND AFTER SEVERAL DAYS, ARRIVED AT THE CREMATION GROUNDS. THE OTHERS WERE ALSO THERE.

YOU LOOK TIRED AND FOOTSORE. WHAT FRESH TRUTHS HAVE YOU DISCOVERED?

THE SECRET OF BRINGING THE DEAD TO LIFE— NO LESS.

HERE IS YOUR CHANCE TO PROVE IT. BRING MADHUMAVATI BACK TO LIFE.

MOST CERTAINLY. YOU HAVE THE BONES AND HE, THE ASHES. MAKE A HEAP OF THEM.

THERE WAS AN AIR OF SUPPRESSED EXCITEMENT. ONE MADE A HEAP OF HER BONES...

HOW KEENLY I AM REMINDED OF THE BEAUTIFUL MADHUMAVATI!

... AND THE OTHER PLACED HER ASHES LOVINGLY ON THEM.
IF WHAT THIS MAN CLAIMS IS TRUE, YOU WILL SOON BE MINE, MADHUMAVATI!
THE THIRD TOOK OUT HIS BOOK AND MUTTERING A SPELL, PASSED HIS HANDS OVER THE HEAP. AND, LO AND BEHOLD! —
HAVE I BEEN ASLEEP? WHERE AM I? WHERE ARE MY PARENTS?

THE YOUNG MEN BEGAN TO ARGUE.
SHE IS MINE. I PRESERVED HER ASHES.
WITHOUT HER BONES, YOUR ASHES WOULD HAVE BEEN NO USE. SO, SHE IS MINE.
MADHUMAVATI LOOKED FROM ONE TO THE OTHER IN AMAZEMENT. THE THIRD YOUNG MAN SAID —
NEITHER YOUR BONES NOR YOUR ASHES COULD HAVE BROUGHT HER TO LIFE. IT WAS MY SPELL THAT DID IT. I CLAIM HER.
KING VIKRAMADITYA WAITED FOR THE VETALA TO SPEAK.
WHICH OF THE THREE HAD THE RIGHT TO MARRY HER?

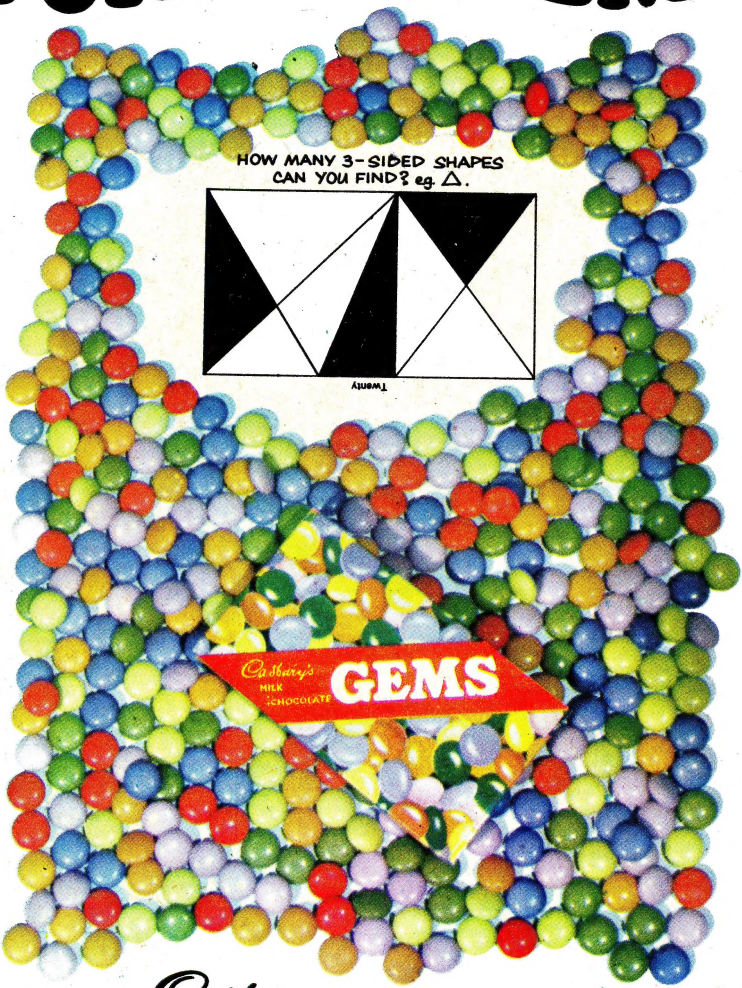
THE ONE WHO KEPT HER ASHES, BUILT A HUT AND WAITED FOR HER.
WHY SO?
A HUSBAND'S FIRST DUTY IS TO PROVIDE A HOME FOR HIS WIFE. THIS HE ALONE OF THE THREE SUITORS DID.
AND, TO THE SOUND OF FLAPPING WINGS AND DEMONIAC LAUGHTER, THE VETALA DISAPPEARED FROM SIGHT.

OUR NEXT TITLE:

THE STRANGE SACRIFICE is yet another story riddle from the *vetala*, and a strange one this time. If the heads of two people are interchanged, what about their identity? Who is who? The story leads up to this point in a most interesting manner.

This issue also brings you MADANASENA. A wife is made to realize the value of marriage and its sanctity—a lesson beautifully taught, and eternally relevant.

FUN WITH GEMS



COLOURFUL CHOCOLATE-CENTRED GEMS.

Cadbury's

GEMS – THE FUN FOOD FOR CHILDREN

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